

Success Story:

Patient Perspective Provides Educational Opportunity and Lesson in Compassion

A patient's story about their care created an educational opportunity and a greater emphasis on patient-centered care at the North Big Horn Hospital of Lovell, Wyoming.

Background

Patient complaints are common in hospital settings, from a messy room to staff not knocking on the door to more serious issues; complaints are feedback to help improve operations at a facility. After a complaint, hospital staff investigates it to find out what happened and how the facility could prevent it from happening again.

In early 2018, North Big Horn received a complaint that was much different than the norm. It was a touching story and a plea for awareness of a rare disease called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, or EDS. The disease is a group of disorders that impact the skin, joints and blood vessels and causes great pain. The patient believed medical staff initially thought she was in the emergency room (ER) to access pain medications. After explaining her condition, she received proper care.

"We knew from reading her impassioned words that we needed to do something, and we owed it to her to do it well," said Tracey Walker, RRT, clinic manager and quality director.

Hospital staff contacted the patient to investigate the claim as part of its process. But the patient didn't want to file a complaint – she wanted to educate her future care team to be more knowledgeable of her condition and ask them to be more compassionate when providing care. The patient described how difficult it was to explain her condition to medical staff when she was in the ER and how describing the condition delayed her care.

The patient then provided educational resources to the hospital staff and invited them to a support group she was developing online. The educational materials were then distributed to nursing and medical staff and the patient's story was told again to emphasize how important it is to always provide compassionate, quality care.

In March, hospital staff invited the patient to meet with the ER steering committee. The committee is charged with evaluating needs in the ER. The patient met with the group and shared her story about her daily life with the condition and the struggles she faces. It was an open and educational discussion where the patient answered questions from providers. The meeting helped providers understand the condition and the need to be more compassionate.

The meeting was so successful and powerful that a few months later, the hospital invited the patient to share her story with the hospital's board of trustees. Her story helped the board understand not only her condition and the care she received, but how complaints are handled in the hospital and how complaints are an important method to improve processes and care delivery.

“By sharing this story and getting to know the person behind the patient, we feel like we are able to give our care team and board a ‘connection to purpose,’” said Walker. “Our care givers were also given the patient’s perspective on how we deliver care and interact with our patients; a reminder for compassion and kindness in our actions and words.”

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